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## The League and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis

BY VERA MICHELES DEAN

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# The League and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis

BY VERA MICHELES DEAN

*with the aid of the Research Staff of the Foreign Policy Association*

ON November 2, 1935 the League members decided that economic and financial sanctions against Italy must go into operation on November 18. This decision, which marks a milestone in the world's struggle to devise an effective system of collective security, was made possible by the renewed cooperation of the two great European democracies—France and Britain—which had seemed to be drifting apart in the Italo-Ethiopian crisis.

Even before reaching the stage of war, the Italo-Ethiopian dispute had created a striking unanimity of opinion in Britain. All political groups, with the exception of die-hard isolationists on the extreme Right and conscientious pacifists on the extreme Left, urged support of the League and collective action against the aggressor. Popular opinion on these questions had already been demonstrated when, in the non-partisan peace ballot conducted in May 1935 by the British League of Nations Union, 11,000,000 votes were cast for continued British participation in the League and 10,000,000 for economic sanctions.<sup>1</sup>

As Italy's designs in Ethiopia became increasingly apparent during the summer, the British public displayed a moral indignation which, although regarded in France as the latest form of Anglo-Saxon hypocrisy, sprang none the less from sincere reaction against a country violating its Covenant obligations by preparing to attack another League member. Such differences of opinion as appeared below the surface were concerned with motives and methods rather than ultimate ends. The Conservatives, who form the backbone of the National Government, sought primarily to check Italy's imperialist campaign, which they considered a threat to the "life-line" of the Empire and to British dominion in Egypt; and the League offered them an instrument which, if effective, seemed preferable to unilateral British action against Italy. With a view to protecting British interests, they

demanded greater military and naval preparedness, not only to enable Britain to fulfill its obligations as a League member, but to insure the success of unilateral action should the League prove impotent in the Ethiopian crisis.<sup>2</sup> The Laborites, opposed both to imperialism and rearmament, hoped by means of League sanctions to overthrow Mussolini and thus end the growing threat of Fascism.<sup>3</sup> All groups shared the belief that if the League were allowed to fail in Africa, there would be no hope for collective security against aggression in Europe.

Britain's policy placed France in a peculiarly difficult position. Since the World War France has steadfastly furthered the idea of a strong and efficient League, on the assumption that League sanctions would be applied only to one possible aggressor—Germany. Britain, pursuing its traditional policy of balance of power on the Continent, has time and again checked France's attempts to transform the League into an instrument of French hegemony—most recently last June, when it sanctioned Nazi rearmament in violation of the Versailles Treaty by concluding a separate naval agreement with Germany. At the same time, Britain's reluctance to apply League sanctions against Japan in Manchuria and to undertake clear-cut commitments in Central and Eastern Europe have served to weaken the League and diminish its prestige. When Britain unexpectedly insisted on strong League action in the Ethiopian crisis, the French concluded that Britain was less interested in preservation of peace by collective action than in protection of its imperial interests. They asked whether, when those interests were not at stake—as in

2. Cf. speeches by Sir Samuel Hoare, British Foreign Secretary, and Prime Minister Baldwin in the House of Commons, October 22 and 23, 1935. *New York Times*, October 23 and 24, 1935.

3. Cf. speech by William Kean, president of the British Trades Unions, at the Trades Unions Congress in Margate, September 2, 1935, *The Times* (London), September 3, 1935; also speeches by J. R. Clynes and Herbert Morrison at the Labour Party Conference in Brighton on October 2, 1935, *ibid.*, October 3, 1935.

1. Dame Adelaide Livingstone, *The Peace Ballot—The Official History* (London, Gollancz, 1935).

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Austria and Memel—Britain would act with similar vigor and determination. Unless "perfidious Albion" gave a pledge to follow in Europe the course it wanted France to adopt in Africa, Premier Laval was reluctant to jettison Italy, which he regarded as a valuable ally against Germany.

The Italo-Ethiopian dispute produced a profound cleavage in French opinion. The Right elements, which had hitherto backed the League with German aggression in mind, now did everything in their power to sabotage League sanctions and localize the conflict in Ethiopia.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, the French Left—composed of such diverse elements as the moderate Radical Socialists, supporting M. Herriot, and the Popular Front, embracing extreme Radical Socialists, Socialists and Communists—demanded collective action and economic pressure on Italy in the hope of overthrowing Mussolini, but shrank from military sanctions, fearing these would involve France in a European war which would benefit Germany alone.<sup>5</sup>

This complete reversal in the rôles which France and Britain had played at Geneva since 1919 was revealed as soon as the League Council convened for its September session.<sup>6</sup> The arbitral award of September 3, rendered under the Italo-Ethiopian arbitration treaty of 1928, had cleared both Italy and Ethiopia of responsibility for the Ual Ual incident, but had failed to terminate the dispute between the two countries. The Fascist government, abandoning its attempt to use an obscure frontier clash as a pretext for war, submitted its case against Ethiopia to the League Council for the first time on September 4, when its chief delegate, Baron Aloisi, presented a memorandum reviewing the internal situation of Ethiopia as well as Italy's political and economic relations with that country since 1889.<sup>7</sup> This memorandum declared that in spite of Ethiopian hostility Italy had followed a policy of collaboration with Addis Ababa. The Ethiopian government, however, had "responded with an attitude not merely negative, but hostile or definitely aggressive."

The memorandum asserted that during the past forty years Ethiopia had refused to define its frontiers with Italy's East African colonies; had tol-

4. *Le Temps* (Paris); Alfred Fabre-Luce, "Une grande partie diplomatique," *L'Europe Nouvelle*, September 21, 1935, p. 900.

5. Cf. editorials by Léon Blum, leader of the Socialist party, in *Le Populaire*.

6. For discussion of the Italo-Ethiopian dispute before September 4, 1935, cf. William Koren, Jr., "Imperialist Rivalries in Ethiopia," *Foreign Policy Reports*, September 11, 1935.

7. League of Nations, Dispute between Ethiopia and Italy, Request of the Ethiopian Government, *Memorandum by the Italian Government on the Situation in Ethiopia, I. Report, II. Documents*, C.340.M.171., Geneva, September 1935.

erated continual offenses against the immunity of Italian diplomatic and consular representatives; and had permitted repeated attacks on the lives and property of Italian citizens. Ethiopia, said the memorandum, had "systematically violated all the treaties concluded with Italy," and had "rendered impossible any pacific and friendly economic and civilized collaboration." On the contrary, "inspired by deliberate and particular hostility toward Italy, devoid of any adequate organization, and incapable of controlling her own people or the populations subject to her, Ethiopia constitutes an immediate and constant danger to Italy, inasmuch as she imperils the security of the Italian colonies in East Africa."

All Italian economic activities, said the memorandum, had encountered "the most systematic and definite obstruction" on the part of Ethiopia. Among the many foreigners employed as technicians by Addis Ababa only one—an electrical engineer—was Italian, and Ethiopia had shown no disposition to build lines of communication for trade with the Italian colonies, which "still has to follow the old caravan and mule tracks." Italy, which claimed that its treaties with Ethiopia entitled it to a predominant position, had thus been placed "in a position of inferiority compared with other powers."<sup>8</sup>

Turning to the internal situation, the memorandum alleged that the Addis Ababa government "lives by dominion over other conquered African peoples," practicing the slave trade and encouraging the *gebar* system of land tenure, which "is a form of slavery." The survival of slavery, according to Italy, represented a flagrant violation of the particular obligations assumed by Ethiopia when it was admitted to the League in 1923. Ethiopia, moreover, had failed to eradicate various barbarous customs and practices, illustrated by photographs annexed to the Italian memorandum. "Surely the League of Nations must consider that a state such as Ethiopia, in which barbarism is still systematic, is unworthy to stand side by side with civilized nations."<sup>9</sup>

On the basis of this evidence, the Fascist government reached the conclusion that Ethiopia, by repeatedly violating the League Covenant, had placed itself outside the pale of the League, and had lost all right to invoke the Covenant against other League members; nor were states members of the League under further obligation to observe the Covenant in their relations with Ethiopia. Italy, "who stands in most urgent and recognized need of colonial expansion," also suffered "the

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

greatest damage through the present situation" in the Ethiopian empire.<sup>10</sup> In "rising up against such an intolerable situation," Italy was defending "her security, her rights and her dignity," as well as "the prestige and good name of the League of Nations."<sup>11</sup>

Ethiopia replied to the Italian memorandum on September 5, when its delegate Teclé Hawariate, and his French adviser, Professor Jèze, were invited to sit at the Council table. Baron Aloisi, refusing to deal with representatives of a state he did not regard as Italy's equal, immediately retired from the Council chamber, leaving Signor Rocco, his second in command, in Italy's seat. Professor Jèze declared that Italy, resolved to conquer and suppress Ethiopia, had begun "by giving Ethiopia a bad name," heaping "ignominious insults" on a power known to be militarily weak. At this point Signor Rocco, after consulting Baron Aloisi outside the Council chamber, requested M. Ruiz Guinazu, Argentine president of the Council, to suspend the sitting on the ground that Professor Jèze was insulting Italy. This M. Guinazu refused to do. Signor Rocco then withdrew, and Italy's seat at the Council table remained vacant for the remainder of the sitting. Professor Jèze, after further criticizing Italy's arguments, asserted that Ethiopia, by its action, was "defending not only its own independence and existence, but also that of all members of the League." He requested the Council to take immediate action under Article XV of the Covenant "to prevent the impending war," declaring in conclusion: "Ethiopia refuses to believe that she must count only on the strength of her despair to defend her territory and her life."<sup>12</sup>

Following arduous private negotiations, in the course of which Italy at first refused to submit its case against Ethiopia to a Council committee, the Council decided on September 6 to appoint a Committee of Five, composed of representatives of Britain, France, Poland, Spain and Turkey. This committee, headed by Salvador de Madariaga of Spain, was "to make a general examination of Italo-Ethiopian relations and to seek for a pacific settlement."<sup>13</sup> Baron Aloisi, while acquiescing in the Council's procedure, abstained from voting on appointment of the committee. Following the withdrawal of Teclé Hawariate and M. Jèze, however, he returned to the Council table.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

12. League of Nations, Eighty-eighth Session of the Council, Minutes, Second Meeting (Public), September 5, 1935, P.V.2(1), p. 2.

13. Statement by M. Ruiz Guinazu, president of the Council. League of Nations, Eighty-eighth Session of the Council, Minutes, Third Meeting, September 6, 1935, P.V.3(1), p. 3.

While the Committee of Five was studying the Italian memorandum and an Ethiopian commentary submitted on September 14,<sup>14</sup> the dispute was discussed by virtually every speaker in the League Assembly, which had opened on September 9. The keynote of the discussion was sounded on September 11 by Sir Samuel Hoare, British Foreign Secretary, who declared that the British people supported the League not because of selfish motives, but because as practical realists they "wished to find a more effective instrument for peace."<sup>15</sup>

Successful operation of collective security, he said, had been subject to fulfilment of several important conditions: reduction of armaments; "modification, by consent and by peaceful means, of international conditions whose continuance might be a danger to peace"; acceptance of the League system by all or most of the states of the world. None of these conditions had been entirely fulfilled. The burden undertaken by League members had consequently been "increased manifold." If this burden "is to be borne, it must be borne collectively. If risks for peace are to be run, they must be run by all." It is not sufficient, however, "to insist collectively that war shall not occur or that war, if it occurs, shall be brought to an end. Something must also be done to remove the causes from which war is apt to arise." But a demand for change "must be justified by the facts of the case," and "the justice of a claim is not necessarily in proportion to the national passions which are aroused in support of it [by] artificial excitement of national feeling." The world, Sir Samuel said with emphasis, "is not static, and changes will, from time to time, have to be made . . . . But such changes will have to be made when they are really necessary and when the time is ripe, and not before; they will have to come about by consent and not by dictation, by agreement and not by unilateral action, by peaceful means and not by war or threat of war."

Sir Samuel Hoare admitted that "fear of monopoly—of the withholding of essential raw materials" is causing alarm, and that desire for a guarantee "that the distribution of raw materials will not be unfairly impeded" is "stimulating the demand for further enquiry." The British government, he declared, would be ready to take its share "in an investigation of these matters," emphasizing free distribution of colonial raw materials among industrial countries which require them, "so that all fear of exclusion or monopoly may be removed once and for all." Such an inquiry, however, "needs calm and dispassionate consideration, and calm and dispassionate consideration is impossible in an atmosphere of war and threats of war."

"To suggest or insinuate" that British support of the League was peculiar to the Italo-Ethiopian dispute "would be a complete misunderstanding," said Sir Samuel. "It is to the principles of the League, and not to any particular manifestation, that the British nation has demonstrated its adherence. Any other view is at once an underestimate of our good faith and an imputation upon our sincerity." He then solemnly and emphatically declared:

"In conformity with its precise and explicit obligations, the League stands, and my country stands with it, for the collective maintenance of the Covenant in its entirety, and particularly for steady and collective resistance to all acts of unprovoked aggression. The attitude of the British nation in the last few weeks has demonstrated the fact that this is no variable and unreliable sentiment, but a principle of international conduct to

14. League of Nations, Dispute between Italy and Ethiopia, Request of the Ethiopian Government, *Commentary of M. Marcel Griaule on Some Questions dealt with in the Italian Memorandum Concerning the Situation in Ethiopia*, C.357.M.182., Geneva, September 14, 1935.

15. League of Nations, *Verbatim Record of the Sixteenth Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the League of Nations*, Third Plenary Meeting, September 11, 1935, p. 4.

which they and their government hold with firm, enduring and universal persistence.

"There, then, is the British attitude toward the Covenant. I cannot believe that it will be changed so long as the League remains an effective body and the main bridge between the United Kingdom and the Continent remains intact."

Britain's determined stand for collective security, supported by all the British Dominions and the Irish Free State as well as the small European powers, confronted the French government with its most painful dilemma since the end of the World War. On the one hand France, which had always demanded a powerful international organization geared to apply swift and drastic sanctions against an aggressor, could not but welcome Hoare's statement. On the other hand M. Laval, having promised Mussolini a free hand in East Africa in return for Italian assistance against Hitler's designs on Austria, was loath to turn League sanctions against Italy.

M. Laval sought to steer an adroit middle course and give verbal support to Britain and the League without irrevocably alienating Mussolini. In his address to the Assembly on September 13 he merely reiterated France's unswerving loyalty to the League Covenant as well as its unaltered friendship for Italy.<sup>16</sup> M. Laval also seized this opportunity to read a maximum British commitment into the words of Sir Samuel Hoare. With particular emphasis he welcomed the "engagement" taken by the British Foreign Secretary, whose declaration, he said, implied "a spirit of solidarity in the matter of responsibilities of all kinds, in all circumstances and at all times and places" which marked "an epoch in the history of the League." In an attempt to obtain further clarification of British policy, M. Charles Corbin, French Ambassador to London, had already informed the British Foreign Office on September 10 that France wished to learn "to what extent" it might be assured in the future of "immediate and effective" application by Britain of all the sanctions provided by Article XVI in the event of violation of the League Covenant and resort to force in Europe by any state, whether member of the League or not.<sup>17</sup>

The most constructive proposal made to the Assembly came from the Ethiopian delegate, Teclé Hawariate, who said on September 11 that his government would welcome "any suggestion calculated to raise the economic, financial or political level" of Ethiopia, "provided it proceeds from the

16. *Ibid.*, Sixth Plenary Meeting, September 13, 1935, p. 1.

17. Cf. letter addressed by Sir Samuel Hoare, British Foreign Secretary, to M. Corbin on September 26, 1935. *The Times*, September 30, 1935.

League of Nations and is to be carried out in the actual spirit of the Covenant."<sup>19</sup>

Baron Aloisi, alone of the representatives of the great powers, made no attempt to address the Assembly. Italy, however, entered the discussion indirectly on September 14, when the Fascist cabinet issued an official communiqué stating that preparations in East Africa were proceeding with greater intensity so as to guarantee Italy against "preponderant Ethiopian forces whose mobilization is already taking place." Mussolini, according to the communiqué, had demonstrated that the country's total military forces "on land and sea and in the air" were such as to "respond to any menace, from whatever quarter it may come." The cabinet emphasized that European collaboration could not be shattered by a colonial conflict or by the use of sanctions, "which were never specified and never applied in far more serious previous controversies between members of the League of Nations." In conclusion, it asserted that the Italo-Ethiopian dispute did not "admit of compromise solutions after the enormous efforts and sacrifices borne by Italy and after the irrefutable documentation contained in the Italian memorandum presented in Geneva."<sup>20</sup>

#### COUNCIL PROPOSALS FOR SETTLEMENT

It was in the midst of Italy's intensified military preparations that the League Committee of Five, on September 18, presented its proposals for pacific settlement of the dispute in identical notes addressed to the two parties.<sup>21</sup> Without expressing any opinion on the documents submitted by Italy and Ethiopia, the committee took as its point of departure Teclé Hawariate's request for League assistance in the reconstruction of the Ethiopian empire. In view of Ethiopia's special obligations with respect to the suppression of slavery and the traffic in arms, the committee concluded that

"it appears to be the duty of the League of Nations to extend to the Ethiopian government collaboration and assistance on a collective international basis so as to enable the latter resolutely to undertake the wide measure of constructive action necessary, not only to improve the lot of the Ethiopian people and to develop the natural resources of the country, but also to enable the empire to live in harmony with its neighbors."

19. League of Nations, *Verbatim Record of the Sixteenth Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the League of Nations*, Fourth Plenary Meeting, September 11, 1935.

20. *Corriere della Sera*, September 15, 1935.

21. League of Nations, Dispute between Ethiopia and Italy, Request of the Ethiopian Government, *Text of the Note handed by the Chairman of the Committee of Five to the Ethiopian and Italian Representatives on September 18, 1935*, C.375.M.189., Geneva, September 21, 1935.

Any plan of League assistance was to receive the previous consent of the Ethiopian government.

The Committee of Five then outlined the form international assistance might take. According to this outline the Council, with the consent of the Emperor, was to appoint four principal foreign advisers to head and reorganize Ethiopian services in four main fields: police and gendarmerie; economic development, including public works, foreign trade and foreign participation in economic enterprises; finances; and justice, education and public health. One of these advisers or a special appointee was to coordinate the work of his colleagues and act as League delegate to the Emperor, reporting to the Council at least once a year. A mission of foreign specialists was to organize a corps of police and gendarmerie to enforce laws prohibiting slavery and regulating the bearing of arms, maintain internal security and guard the frontiers. In addition, Britain and France declared they were ready to facilitate territorial adjustments between Italy and Ethiopia by offering Haile Selassie compensation "in the region of the Somaliland coast," and recognized "a special Italian interest in the economic development of Ethiopia."

To these proposals Ethiopia returned a favorable reply, made public on September 23. It noted with pleasure that League assistance and collaboration were to be "collective and international," and declared it was ready to negotiate immediately.<sup>22</sup>

Far less encouraging was the answer made by Italy. The Fascist cabinet met on September 21 and issued a communiqué in which it stated that, while "appreciating" the attempt made by the Committee of Five, it "had decided to consider these proposals as unacceptable, inasmuch as they did not offer a minimum basis sufficient for conclusive realizations which would finally and effectively take into account the rights and the vital interests of Italy."<sup>23</sup> This communiqué was amplified in an oral statement which Baron Aloisi made to M. de Madariaga, chairman of the Committee of Five, on September 22.<sup>24</sup> The Italian delegate stated that the committee had not taken into consideration Italy's specific charges against Ethiopia, nor had it considered "whether Ethiopia is still worthy to belong to the League." Aloisi argued that, "had some latitude of judgment and elasticity of ap-

plication been allowed for, even on the lines of such League principles as are embodied in the institution of mandates, the solution of the problem would have been brought nearer." He objected that, under the League plan, army organization would be left free of foreign control, and protested that "the Italian reasons, based on treaties, historical facts, the defense of the Italian colonies and Italy's mission in Africa" had been completely ignored in the committee's proposals. Italy, he said, also opposed cession to Ethiopia of an outlet to the sea through French or British Somaliland, on the ground that this would transform Ethiopia into a maritime power, "thus heightening the real threat that she constitutes to Italy." It was reported from Rome that the conditions on which Mussolini would consider League proposals included the demands that Italy be granted a strip of territory connecting Eritrea and Italian Somaliland; that the Ethiopian forces be disarmed and reorganized under Italian control; and that Ethiopia should obtain an outlet to the sea through Italian, not French or British territory. These demands were described by Ethiopia as unacceptable.<sup>25</sup> An official communiqué issued by the Fascist cabinet on September 24 declared that Italy had presented no counter-proposals at Geneva and that events since September 21 had proved "the attitude of the Italian government could not have been different."<sup>26</sup>

The conciliatory tone of Italy's rejection was attributed in Geneva to the rapid naval preparations which Britain, without waiting for League action, had been making in the Mediterranean since the beginning of September. By September 20 virtually the entire British Home Fleet had been concentrated between Gibraltar and the Suez Canal, ships had been summoned from distant China and West Indies stations, defenses at Gibraltar, Malta and Egypt had been strengthened on land and sea and in the air, and troop reinforcements had been rushed to Britain's possessions in North and East Africa. These preparations aroused fear and resentment in Italy, where the government-controlled press asserted that Britain, gorged with colonial possessions, was playing a dog in the manger rôle, denying the Italian proletariat the opportunity to obtain a livelihood in Ethiopia. To meet the menace of exiled Senussites,<sup>27</sup> allegedly subsidized by the British, Italy increased its troops in Libya on the Egyptian frontier. On Septem-

22. League of Nations, Dispute between Ethiopia and Italy, Request of the Ethiopian Government, *Reply of the Ethiopian Government to the Suggestions and Communications of the Committee of Five*, C.378.M.190., Geneva, September 23, 1935.

23. League of Nations, Dispute between Ethiopia and Italy, Request of the Ethiopian Government, *Report of the Committee of Five to the Council*, C.379.M.191., Geneva, September 24, 1935.

24. *Ibid.*, Annex 2, p. 5.

25. *New York Herald Tribune*, September 24, 1935.

26. *Corriere della Sera*, September 25, 1935.

27. The Senussites, a fanatic religious sect, had resisted Italian occupation of Libya after the Italo-Turkish war of 1911-1912. This rebellion was not suppressed until 1932 when, following Italy's campaign of "pacification," the surviving Senussites took refuge across the border in Egypt.

ber 20, when anti-British sentiment in Italy had reached the boiling point, Sir Samuel Hoare sought to allay Italian apprehension and personally assured Mussolini through Sir Eric Drummond, British Ambassador in Rome, that Britain's naval measures were motivated solely by the violent tone of the Italian press, were purely "precautionary" in character, and implied no "aggressive intention against Italy."<sup>28</sup>

On September 24, however, after Italy had rejected the proposals of the Committee of Five, Sir Samuel Hoare put the following question to M. Charles Corbin, French Ambassador to London: during the intermediary period which must elapse between the moment when a League member declares the intention to fulfill its obligations under Article XVI of the Covenant and the moment when the League declares this article applicable by all its members, could Britain count on France for the mutual aid envisaged in paragraph 3 of Article XVI?<sup>29</sup> In other words, Britain wished to ascertain whether, while making naval preparations in the Mediterranean to apply League sanctions, it would receive French aid if its navy were attacked by Italy. The British thus attempted to fill a gap in the Covenant, which makes no provision for collective support of a League member before the League has formulated its recommendations.

The League Council, having meanwhile examined the Committee of Five report, decided on September 26 to deal with the Italo-Ethiopian dispute under Article XV of the Covenant, already invoked by Ethiopia, and ruled that this article had become applicable on September 4, once the arbitral commission had rendered its award.<sup>30</sup> It then unanimously voted, in the absence of Italy, to sit as a Committee of Thirteen and immediate-

28. *New York Times*, September 23, 1935.

29. *The Economist* (London), October 12, 1935, p. 699. For the French version of the British question, cf. *Le Temps*, October 9, 1935. Paragraph 3 of Article XVI provides: "The Members of the League agree, further, that they will mutually support one another in the financial and economic measures which are taken under this Article, in order to minimize the loss and inconvenience resulting from the above measures, and that they will mutually support one another in resisting any special measures aimed at one of their number by the covenant-breaking State, and that they will take the necessary steps to afford passage through their territory to the forces of any of the Members of the League which are cooperating to protect the covenants of the League."

30. League of Nations, Eighty-ninth Session of the Council, *Minutes*, Third Meeting (Private, then Public), September 26, 1935, P.V.3(1), p. 4.

31. This paragraph provides that, if a dispute is not settled by the Council, the latter "either unanimously or by a majority vote shall make and publish a report containing a statement of the facts of the dispute and the recommendations which are deemed just and proper in regard thereto."

ly begin drafting a report under paragraph 4 of Article XV.<sup>31</sup>

The action of the Council in applying Article XV represented a tactical defeat for Italy, which continued to insist that Ethiopia, an outlaw nation, had no right to invoke the Covenant against a League member. Mussolini, however, still expected that the League would not resort to sanctions and that the people of Britain and France would hesitate to transform a colonial campaign into a European war. In a communiqué issued on September 28 the Fascist cabinet charged that while the League of Nations shut itself up "in the formal labyrinths of its procedures," Ethiopia had completed mobilization of all its forces with the intention of attacking Italy's colonial frontiers; the departure of Italian forces to East Africa had consequently assumed a "notably accelerated rhythm." With unwonted enthusiasm for democratic public opinion, the cabinet appealed to the British people to disregard "anti-Fascist mystifications" and understand that Italy was willing to negotiate further accords which would protect "legitimate British interests in East Africa." Italy, according to this communiqué, would adopt a passive rôle and take no further initiative in the hostile environment of Geneva. At the same time it would avoid everything "that could extend the Italo-Ethiopian conflict to a wider field," and would not abandon the League until the day the League itself fully assumed responsibility for "measures" striking at Italy.<sup>32</sup>

Mussolini's expectation that the League might not match words with deeds seemed justified by continued divergence between French and British conceptions of sanctions. This divergence was not removed by the letter which Sir Samuel Hoare addressed on September 26 to M. Corbin, French Ambassador in London.<sup>33</sup> To the French inquiry of September 10 regarding the action Britain would take in case of aggression by a European state, whether member of the League or not, Sir Samuel reiterated that Britain stood for "steady and collective resistance to all acts of unprovoked aggression." The procedure outlined by Article XVI of the Covenant, however, would not apply to "the negative act of the failure to fulfill the terms of a treaty." A distinction, alarming to the French, was thus drawn between Italy's threatened aggression in Ethiopia and Germany's potential violations of the Versailles Treaty, such as consummation without resort to force of the Austro-German union prohibited by the peace treaties. The British Foreign Secretary pointed out, more-

32. *Corriere della Sera*, September 29, 1935.

33. For complete text, cf. *The Times*, September 30, 1935.

over, that action under Article XVI "may vary according to the circumstances of each particular case"—thus giving France no definite pledge regarding the procedure Britain might follow in the event of German aggression against Memel or Austria. In conclusion Sir Samuel expounded a thesis which conflicted with the basic concepts of France's post-war policy—that "elasticity is a part of security, and that every member of the League must recognize, as the Covenant itself recognizes, that the world is not static."

Before Britain and France had had an opportunity to reconcile their divergent points of view Mussolini cast the die for war on October 2, when 20,000,000 Italians—men, women and children—were summoned by sirens and church bells to hold the long-awaited mass demonstration of Fascist discipline and hear a speech by Mussolini. In this speech, broadcast throughout the world, *Il Duce* asserted that Italy was moved by an "irresistible" destiny and had no more patience with Ethiopia. He refused to believe that "the authentic and generous French people" could participate in sanctions against their war ally, Italy, or that the British people would "thrust Europe on the road to catastrophe" to defend a barbarous country. But should the League apply sanctions, Italy was prepared for all eventualities: to economic sanctions it would respond "with our discipline, our frugality, our spirit of sacrifice"; to military measures, with military measures; and to acts of war, with acts of war.<sup>34</sup>

This speech was the opening gun in the Italian campaign against Ethiopia, which began the next day, allegedly to defend Italian territory against imminent Ethiopian attack.<sup>35</sup> The Italian troops invaded Haile Selassie's empire from north, east and south. Adowa, where Italians had suffered a crushing defeat in 1896, was occupied on October 6, thus wiping out what Italy had long regarded as a blot on its military escutcheon.

#### THE LEAGUE IMPOSES SANCTIONS

Meanwhile, the League Council, sitting as a Committee of Thirteen in the absence of Italy, published its report on October 5.<sup>36</sup> After reviewing the history of the Italo-Ethiopian dispute, the

34. *Corriere della Sera*, October 3, 1935.

35. League of Nations, Dispute between Ethiopia and Italy, Request of the Ethiopian Government, *Telegram addressed by Fulvio Suvich, Italian Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs, to the Secretary-General of the League of Nations on October 3, 1935*, C.404.M.200., Geneva, October 3, 1935.

36. League of Nations, Dispute between Ethiopia and Italy, Request of the Ethiopian Government, *Report of the Council under Article XV, paragraph 4, of the Covenant*, C.411.M.-207.VII., Geneva, October 7, 1935.

committee stated that while incidents had occurred from time to time along the Ethiopian borders, they were not in the nature of aggression "sought for or encouraged by the central [Ethiopian] government," and that none of the three contiguous states—Britain, France and Italy—had at any time laid these incidents before the Council, which "would have certainly endeavored to remedy the situation." It pointed out that the states which in 1923 had supported Ethiopia's admission to the League—of which Italy and France were the most enthusiastic—were aware of its internal situation, and that this situation had since improved rather than deteriorated. Ethiopia, the report continued, had from the outset of the dispute sought a settlement by peaceful means; had requested League cooperation "in raising the economic, financial and political level of the empire"; and had accepted in principle the proposals of the League Committee of Five, rejected by Italy.

On October 5 the League Council, after hearing statements by Baron Aloisi and Teclé Hawariate, appointed a Committee of Six to prepare a report which would enable it to take "decisions with full knowledge of the matters involved."<sup>37</sup> This committee, composed of representatives of Britain, France, Chile, Denmark, Rumania and Portugal, reached the conclusion on October 7 that war existed and that Italy had resorted to war in disregard of its obligations under Article XII of the League Covenant.<sup>38</sup> This article provides that League members shall in no case resort to war until three months after a report by the Council. A state resorting to war in violation of Article XII incurs the penalties of Article XVI, paragraph 1 of which calls for immediate severance of all economic and financial relations with the covenant-breaker. On October 7 the thirteen members of the Council, with the exception of Italy, party to the dispute, individually<sup>39</sup> approved the report of the Committee of Six, naming Italy the aggressor. For the first time in its history the League,

37. League of Nations, Eighty-Ninth Session of the Council, Minutes, Fifth Meeting (Private, then Public), October 5, 1935, p. 5.

38. *Ibid.*, Seventh Meeting (Public), October 7, 1935, Geneva, October 8, 1935, p. 7.

39. On October 4, 1921 the League Assembly adopted a series of resolutions and proposals for amendments to Article XVI of the Covenant which, so long as the amendments had not been put in force, were to serve the Council and League Members as rules of guidance in applying Article XVI. Resolution 4 stated that "it is the duty of each Member of the League to decide for itself whether a breach of the Covenant has been committed." League of Nations, *Official Journal, Resolutions and Recommendations adopted by the Assembly during its Second Session (September 5 to October 5, 1921)*. Special Supplement No. 6, Geneva, October 1921, p. 24. Ethiopia also approved the report of the Committee of Six.

which in 1933 had merely condemned Japan's invasion of Manchuria without taking further action, had designated the aggressor and invoked Article XVI of the Covenant.<sup>40</sup> The dispute between Italy and Ethiopia was thus broadened into a conflict between Italy and the League.

Acting independently of the other powers and without waiting for the League to pass judgment on Italy's invasion of Ethiopia, President Roosevelt had issued two proclamations on October 5 and 6 under authority of the neutrality resolution passed by Congress on August 24, 1935.<sup>41</sup> The first proclamation, applying Section 1 of the resolution, which expires on February 29, 1936, placed an embargo on the export of arms, ammunition and implements of war to both belligerents.<sup>42</sup> The second proclamation,<sup>43</sup> warning American citizens against traveling on ships of either warring country, invoked Section 6 of the resolution, which permits wide discretion in determining when this measure should be applied. Action was taken on the ground that the existing state of war made the warning necessary for "the protection of the lives of citizens of the United States." A still broader application of the same principle was contained in a public statement<sup>44</sup> issued with the first proclamation on October 5, when President Roosevelt declared: "In these specific circumstances I desire it to be understood that any of our people who voluntarily engage in transactions of any character with either of the belligerents do so at their own risk."

These two proclamations constituted a departure from the traditional neutrality policies followed by American governments,<sup>45</sup> and permitted a limited degree of non-interference with any program of economic and financial sanctions applied by League members against an aggressor. The neutrality legislation in its existing form did not permit the President to do more unless he chose to extend the definition of "implements of war," embracing six categories of arms and ammunition, to include raw materials essential for war such as fuel oil, cotton, copper and scrap iron. Many American exporters, protesting against President Roosevelt's warning that trade with belligerents

40. League of Nations, Eighty-Ninth Session of the Council, *Minutes*, Seventh Meeting (Public), A.78., October 7, 1935, Geneva, October 8, 1935, p. 9.

41. United States, 74th Congress, Public Resolution No. 67, S. J. Res. 173.

42. Department of State, *Press Releases*, October 5, 1935, p. 251.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 256.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 255.

45. American neutrality policy will be discussed in a forthcoming issue of *Foreign Policy Reports*.

was "at their own risk," announced their intention of continuing exports to Italy.

Undeterred by the action of the League and the United States, Mussolini sought to resume diplomatic negotiations with Britain and France in the hope of reaching a settlement of the conflict outside Geneva. On October 4 Dino Grandi, Italian Ambassador in London, called on Sir Samuel Hoare with a personal message from *Il Duce* proposing that Britain withdraw its fleet from the Mediterranean, in return for which Italy would recall the troops it had concentrated in Libya on the Egyptian border.<sup>46</sup> The British government rejected these proposals, steadfastly insisting that negotiations had to be carried on not with individual League members but with the League as a whole.

Britain's demand for strong collective action envisaged not only Italy, but another potential disturber of European peace—Germany. That Britain was fully alive to the danger of German aggression was indicated on October 4, when Prime Minister Baldwin, addressing the Conservative party conference at Bournemouth, said that "the whole perspective of the continent" had been altered by two new factors—the rearming of Germany and the rise of dictatorships which sooner or later seek "to divert attention from domestic difficulties to external adventures."<sup>47</sup>

France, fearing that sanctions against Italy might unleash a European war which would serve Germany as a pretext for satisfying its territorial ambitions, demanded explicit commitments from Great Britain. To the British inquiry of September 24 regarding French assistance in case Britain, having announced its intention to apply Article XVI, were attacked by the Italian navy, M. Laval returned a guarded answer in a note published on October 7.<sup>48</sup> France, he declared, would be ready to assist Britain on two principal conditions: measures preparatory to application of the League Covenant and the Locarno treaties must be preceded by consultation between the two countries, thus precluding action by Britain alone against Italy; and Britain must reciprocate by promising in advance to assist France on land and in the air in case of threatened attack. On both these points France requested an unequivocal reply from the British government.

The League Assembly, reconvened on October 9 by its president, Foreign Minister Benes of Czechoslovakia, named Italy the aggressor on October 11, when fifty-one of the fifty-eight League

47. *The Times*, October 5, 1935.

48. *New York Times*, October 5, 1935.

49. *Le Temps*, October 9, 1935.

members gave silent approval to the Council decision.<sup>50</sup> Countries opposing the Council's verdict were alone invited to speak in the Assembly—this procedure having been adopted as less humiliating to Italy than a dramatic roll-call of the nations; and only three—Albania, Austria and Hungary, all closely bound to Italy by political and economic ties—availed themselves of the opportunity to support the Italian cause.<sup>51</sup> Of the fifty-one states which agreed that Italy had incurred the penalties of Article XVI of the Covenant by resort to war, four—Switzerland, Chile, Uruguay and Venezuela—made reservations tending to restrict their execution of this article. The most explicit reservation was that of Switzerland, which undertook to apply some non-military measures against Italy, but made it clear it would not consider military or even non-military sanctions which might endanger its traditional neutrality.

Before the members of the Assembly were called on by M. Benes to signify their decision, Baron Aloisi made his final appeal to "the conscience of the whole world," asserting that Italy had not received a proper hearing in Geneva. He insisted that the League, which had made no attempt to apply sanctions in the Manchuria and Chaco conflicts, was using "two weights and two measures" in the case of Italy. The Ethiopian delegate, Teclé Hawariate, declared his government was determined to accept no conditions which "give a premium to the aggressor, for that would be a challenge to international morality."

Immediately after naming Italy the aggressor, the League Assembly set up a Committee for Coordination of Measures under Article XVI. This committee, composed of all League members with the exception of Italy, in turn appointed a Committee of Eighteen to act as its general staff. In organizing sanctions against Italy, the Coordination Committee had no precedents to follow. With the exception of an arms embargo imposed on Bolivia and Paraguay during the Chaco war in 1934, the League had never before applied large-scale sanctions against an aggressor. On October 11, acting with unexpected speed, the Coordination Committee, with only Hungary abstaining, adopted Proposal 1 imposing an arms embargo on Italy, applicable to export, re-export and transit trade in arms, ammunition and im-

50. League of Nations, *Journal of the Sixteenth Session of the Assembly*, Seventeenth Plenary Meeting, October 12, 1935, pp. 270-71. The Assembly, instead of closing in accordance with its usual practice, had merely adjourned on September 28 subject to recall at any time by its president. Italy voted against sanctions; the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Paraguay and Salvador were not represented.

51. *Ibid.*, October 10, 1935, pp. 252-53, and October 12, 1935, p. 270.

plements of war, and lifting the embargo on arms exports to Ethiopia.<sup>52</sup> The list of arms and ammunition contained in President Roosevelt's proclamation of October 5 was adopted by the committee, with the addition of powders and explosives.<sup>53</sup>

On October 14 the Coordination Committee, spurred on by Anthony Eden, British Minister for League of Nations Affairs, adopted Proposal 2, in which League members undertook to render impossible all loans and credits, public and private, long-term and short-term, to the Italian government, as well as to all persons and corporations on Italian territory, whether effected directly or through intermediaries of non-Italian nationality. This sweeping prohibition applied not only to future contracts but to those in process of execution, and League members were invited to put it into full operation by October 31.<sup>53a</sup>

The Coordination Committee completed its series of economic and financial sanctions on October 19, when it adopted Proposals 3, 4 and 5, which together formed a far-reaching embargo on trade with Italy. Proposal 3, sponsored by Britain, prohibited importation by League members of all goods coming from Italy, directly or indirectly. This measure, according to British estimates, would automatically cut off 70 per cent of Italian exports and deprive Italy of its principal source of foreign currency, needed for the purchase of essential raw materials abroad. Simultaneously Proposal 4, supported by France, would place an embargo on key raw materials necessary for war. These materials for the time being included only products controlled in whole or in major part by League members: horses, mules and other transport animals required by Italy in the Ethiopian campaign; rubber; and various metals and minerals, notably bauxite, aluminum, iron ore, scrap iron, chromium, manganese, nickel, tungsten and ferro-alloys. Other key raw materials, such as oil, cotton and copper, are not yet barred, as they are also produced by non-member countries, notably the United States.<sup>54</sup>

By Proposal 5 League members undertook to give each other mutual assistance to minimize

52. League of Nations, Dispute between Ethiopia and Italy, Coordination of Measures under Article XVI of the Covenant, Coordination Committee, *Principal Documents of the First Session (October 11th-19th, 1935)*, Coordination Committee 40, Geneva, October 24, 1935, p. 5.

53. By November 3, 1935 fifty-one states had accepted Proposal 1.

53a. League of Nations, Coordination Committee, *Principal Documents of the First Session*, cited, p. 6. By November 3, 1935 fifty-one states had accepted Proposal 2.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 7-8. By November 3, 1935 forty-nine states had accepted Proposals 3 and 4.

economic losses suffered as a result of applying sanctions against Italy. It was agreed that League members would take steps to replace imports from Italy with imports from states which normally enjoy a profitable Italian market, such as Rumania and Yugoslavia, and would discriminate against League members which benefit by refusal to apply sanctions, such as Albania, Austria and Hungary, described by Soviet Foreign Commissar Litvinov on October 19 as "deserters."<sup>54a</sup>

While the League was perfecting sanctions machinery, its conflict with Italy threatened for several days to develop into a major Franco-British crisis. The French press violently attacked Britain, accusing it of wantonly seeking to precipitate a European war by its intransigence toward Italy. Meanwhile, M. Laval's demand that Britain withdraw its fleet from the Mediterranean to avoid an incident, and his reluctance to give a definite pledge of naval assistance infuriated British opinion. The crisis was temporarily averted on October 18, when Sir Eric Drummond assured Mussolini that Britain did not intend to take any action "beyond what might be agreed to or recommended by the League in conformity with the dispositions of the Covenant." On the same day, M. Laval gave what the Quai d'Orsay described as an "affirmative" reply to Britain's request for naval assistance in the Mediterranean, on condition that the British fleet should be used only in accordance with the League's decision. This reply was further clarified in a French memorandum of October 26, which pledged Franco-British collaboration on sea, land and in the air, provided Britain reduced its Mediterranean fleet. Naval experts of the two countries were to work out details of fueling and provisioning British ships in the French ports of Toulon and Bizerta, Tunis.

The impression that Britain might yield to Italy was removed on October 21, when it announced a policy of "neutrality" in the Italo-Ethiopian conflict. According to this policy, no Italian ship carrying supplies to the army in Eritrea and Italian Somaliland will be permitted to stay in a port of Britain or its crown colonies more than 24 hours or to take on more fuel and foodstuffs than are necessary to reach the nearest Italian port. Britain's policy, which went beyond the 1907 Hague Convention on neutral rights,<sup>55</sup> raised far-reaching problems. According to the League Covenant Italy, by resort-

ing to war, is "deemed to have committed an act of war" against all other League members; and Britain, as a League member, is pledged under the Covenant to apply sanctions against Italy. At the same time, Britain apparently intends to avail itself of neutral rights, whose application cannot be regarded by Italy as an act of war, creates none of the problems raised by blockade or closing of the Suez Canal, and consequently does not threaten to provoke an incident in the Mediterranean.

#### THE RECORD OF THE LEAGUE

What is the League's record to date in the Italo-Ethiopian crisis? To begin with, it has been demonstrated that the League is not yet equipped to prevent the outbreak of war unless it has the full cooperation of the great powers. In the very nature of things an aggressor, single-mindedly determined to achieve his ends by force, strikes swiftly and hard; while an international organization composed of fifty-odd states with divergent interests must at best move slowly. The League, seriously hampered at first by French and British reluctance to antagonize Italy and lose its support against Germany, made no attempt to check Mussolini while troops and supplies were being openly transported to East Africa. Only when Italy, choosing its own time, had invaded Ethiopia, was the League in a position to name the aggressor and set in motion the sanctions provided by Article XVI of the Covenant.

Could the League have averted war in East Africa? Italy insists it needs Ethiopia as an outlet for surplus population and a source of essential raw materials. Hitherto the League has done little to meet the demands of countries like Italy by removing barriers to emigration and facilitating free access to colonial products. Britain has already recognized Italy's need of expansion, has urged elasticity in international relations, and has recommended an inquiry into free distribution of colonial raw materials to industrial countries; but it has insisted that any change must be effected by peaceful means, not by war. Unfortunately, the case of Germany has recently demonstrated that concessions refused to a disarmed and submissive country are promptly made when that country becomes armed and bellicose. This lesson did not pass unheeded by Mussolini, who expected that Britain, having sanctioned Germany's violations of the Versailles Treaty, would not interfere while Italy transgressed its Covenant obligations. When Britain firmly took the lead in applying League sanctions, Italy protested that the League had become a puppet in the hands of the British govern-

<sup>54a</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 9. By November 3, 1935 forty-two states had accepted Proposal 5.

<sup>55</sup>. *The Hague Convention (XIII) of 1907 concerning the Rights and Duties of Neutral Powers in Naval War* (Washington, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1915). This convention applies to belligerent warships, not to supply ships.

ment, which was using it solely to protect its selfish imperial interests. If the League is to become an effective instrument for peace, it must demonstrate not only that it can punish the aggressor, but that it can remove the political and economic maladjustments which precipitate acts of aggression.

If the League cannot yet prevent war, can it succeed in stopping war once it has begun? The League displayed impressive speed and unanimity in formulating economic and financial sanctions against Italy. The effectiveness of these sanctions will depend to a large extent on the economic situation of the aggressor country, the readiness of all League powers to bear their share of the burden imposed by sanctions, and the willingness of non-member states to cooperate with the League. Italy, which exports luxury goods not urgently required by other countries and must import many raw materials needed for war, should be peculiarly vulnerable to economic sanctions. The Italian people, however, have been carefully prepared by government propaganda to endure economic hardships for the sake of securing a place in the African sun. The Fascist government, with such an emergency in view, has accumulated supplies of coal, steel, oil and copper which might suffice to take care of its needs in the immediate future, and is equipped to manufacture arms and ammunition. Nor will a financial embargo materially alter the situation. For three months Italy has already found it impossible to obtain commercial credits in Britain, the United States and other leading countries. True, once a League boycott is imposed on Italian exports, which have hitherto provided much-needed foreign currency, Italy will have to draw more than ever on its dwindling gold reserves to pay for purchases abroad. It is estimated, however, that even under these circumstances the gold reserves, together with private funds mobilized at home and abroad, might enable the government to buy foreign raw materials for another year.

The cooperation of both members and non-members of the League will prove decisive in this first test of collective sanctions. The abstention of Austria and Hungary and the vacillating attitude of Switzerland already indicate that Italy will have no difficulty in importing goods from Germany through border states—provided it can pay cash and the League does not penalize members which refuse to apply sanctions against Mussolini. Unless Germany and the United States, the principal non-

members, decide to embargo essential raw materials, Italy will be able to buy coal, steel, iron, oil and cotton as long as it has réserves of gold and foreign currency. Nor will German and American cargoes destined for Italy by sea be subject to stoppage unless the League blockades the Italian coast. Only if such a blockade is imposed will American exporters become subject to the "risk" against which they have been warned by President Roosevelt. In a sense the United States, by failing to embargo raw materials necessary for war purposes, might force the League to impose a naval blockade—which Mussolini has announced he will regard as an act of war. Economic sanctions thus raise innumerable practical difficulties and leave many convenient loopholes for the aggressor; most serious of all, they present no immediate obstacle to continuance of war in East Africa. Should economic sanctions prove ineffective, the League powers will have to decide whether, to stop the fighting in Ethiopia, they will themselves have to resort to war against Italy by applying the military and naval sanctions ultimately envisaged in Article XVI of the Covenant.

Is the League ready to apply such sanctions? Britain, which would bear the brunt of naval measures in the Mediterranean, has indicated that it is not prepared and does not intend to act alone. A League blockade, moreover, would immediately interfere with American exports to Italy. Will American exporters then voluntarily surrender the possibility of lucrative trade, or will they attempt to do business as usual and then demand United States protection against League powers? Until Britain has ascertained the attitude of Washington on this question it will be slow to take naval measures against Italy. It seems more probable that, while applying economic sanctions, the British will seek to reach a settlement acceptable to Italy, Ethiopia and the League. But any settlement which gives Mussolini more than he would have obtained without resort to war would be disastrous to the prestige of the League and the future of collective security. It would encourage potential aggressors to run the risks of war in the hope that other countries will shrink from running the risks of insuring peace by collective means. The issue at Geneva is whether the world is ready to pay the price of establishing a new order in international relations, or prefers to revert to pre-war military alliances, whose only possible outcome would be another world conflict.